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ABSTRACT

The use of suggestopedia--a technique combining memory expansion and relaxation--as a teaching technique for disabled readers is examined in this paper. The paper first describes the origin of suggestopedia as a therapeutic technique in Bulgaria; it then describes some components of suggestopedia: the creation of physical relaxation, the use of suggestion, the building of student self-confidence, and the use of music. It then tells how suggestopedia was used in an elementary reading program with encouraging results and discusses the organization and results of a grammar course for Air Force personnel in which the suggestopedic method was used. Tables of results are presented to show that results were encouraging although not significant. Finally, the paper discusses the application of suggestopedia in a college reading skills class with English speaking students and students for whom English is a second language. The class organization is described to show the use of "relaxation tape recordings" followed by oral reading by the instructor accompanied by silent reading and then visualization of the story by students. The paper concludes that suggestopedia could, and in some cases has, become an important teaching strategy. (GW)

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SUGGESTOPEDIA: A TEACHING STRATEGY FOR THE SEVERELY DISABLED READER

Bobby M. James

In attempting to better satisfy the needs of individuals in college reading skills classes, new teaching techniques are constantly being sought. These techniques often turn toward the automated learning center approach -- put the student with a machine and let him go to work in the hope that this self-paced instruction will provide the necessary skills needed for a successful educational experience. However, time and experience are telling us that this kind of individualized, self-paced instruction is not the answer for all students.

Countless words have been written concerning the advantages and disadvantages of self-paced programs. Comparisons of the results of self-paced programs to that of more traditional programs have been made with the results usually indicating that there is very little difference between the two. It has been this author's findings that those students who are already highly motivated, firmly disciplined, and already have a reasonably accurate self-image are usually the ones that exhibit substantial progress in self-paced programs. But what is being done to properly instruct those students who are not highly motivated, do not have good self-discipline, and have severe problems in reading?

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This paper is directed toward supplying one answer to that question. It is certainly not the only answer, for there is no one answer; but for the students for whom we are applying the technique, it appears to be a workable solution to their reading problems. This teaching strategy, entitled Suggestopedia, is a relatively new technique in American educational systems, but it is a well proven technique in European institutions. However, because of the lack of English translations of the European work, American educators are taking the basic suggestopedic method -- Classic Suggestopedia -- and making the necessary adaptations to fit the modern American classroom situation. The description offered in this paper is of the suggestopedic process as it is used in various American institutions and particularly as it is applied at South Plains College in Levelland, Texas.

The Origin Of Suggestopedia

In the early 1960's, a Bulgarian psychiatrist, Dr. George Lozanov, first became interested in suggestion as it related to various therapeutic techniques employed at the Medical Post - Graduate Institute in Bulgaria. By the mid-1960's, after considerable research into the question, Lozanov concluded that the patient's choice of therapy bore direct relationship to success of the therapeutic process. The patient's expectations of positive results were likely to be verified in a sort of self-suggestive process. (2) His research and conclusions later led to the adoption by the Institute of "thought anesthesia" -- a suggestion-based technique employed by the patient during surgery.

Early Educational Applications The first educational applications of Suggestopedia were made in 1966 when the Bulgarian Ministry of Education established the Institute of Suggestology in Sofia, Bulgaria. Of primary concern to the Institute was the teaching of foreign language; English,

French, German, Italian, and Russian to adults, and later the teaching of mathematics, history, literature, physics, chemistry, and biology. (1) In 1972, Suggestopedia was adopted for use in Bulgarian elementary schools, and it is now in use in schools from the nursery school level through the university level. Again, because of the lack of English editions concerning the results of these applications, thorough review of the procedures employed and the results attained is impossible. However, at the first International Congress on Suggestopedia held in the western world in May of 1975, Lozanov did indicate that the results were excellent with material coverage 5 to 50 times greater and retention equal to or exceeding traditional methods. (1) From these results, then, one could conclude that the results obtained from European applications of Suggestopedia indicate that this is a very effective teaching strategy.

Applications of the suggestopedic method in the western world from 1973-1975 ranged from the teaching of English and French to Canadian government employees, Hungarian at the University of California in San Diego, Spanish at Texas Tech University, to psychology at Pepperdine University. (1) In these projects, the classic suggestopedic method has been modified to conform to the needs of the modern American classroom, but the basis for all applications continues to be Lozanov's theory of inducing a relaxed body state and, at the same time, a relaxed but alert mental condition.

Components Of Suggestopedia

Suggestopedia is a "technique combining memory expansion and relaxation, creating an alert but relaxed state of mind, during which the anti-suggestion barriers are lowered and increasing the receptiveness of the individual to suggestion and retention of new material." (1:7) Lozanov has hypothesized that all of us are continually exposed to suggestion from

the environment; but in order to protect oneself from receiving too much stimuli, anti-suggestion barriers are established. There are three anti-suggestion barriers. First, the critical logical barrier, which rejects all that does not make a logical impression; second, the intuitional-affective barrier, which rejects all that does not create a feeling of confidence and security; and third, the ethical barrier, which rejects all that contradicts the principles and values of the individual. It is then possible, through bypassing the defense mechanisms, to reach the unused 90% of the brain with a resultant increased learning speed and retention of material with very little effort on the part of the individual. (2) The use of relaxation techniques and deep breathing exercises in Suggestopedia are, therefore, instrumental in reducing anxiety, freeing the mind of distractions that hamper learning, and allowing the new material to be more easily received and retained.

It should also be pointed out that, theoretically language input into the right hemisphere of the brain is possible only if it is accompanied by music or uses a poetic mode. Consequently, the musical background employed in Suggestopedia provides for the language content to be lateralized in the left hemisphere and also to be coded in the right hemisphere. (1) It has been the contention of this writer that people who function with the right hemisphere as the dominant one, in so far as visual input and language is concerned, could profit greatly from instruction based on the suggestopedic method. Research into this question is currently being conducted; but as of this time, no conclusive results have come from the studies. However, we are finding in our research that there is a positive correlation between right hemispherical dominance and reading disability. If this trend continues, plans are being made to use

Suggestopedia as an instructional technique for these right hemispherically dominant students.

Relaxation The use of relaxation in Suggestopedia is vital, as it is through the use of these techniques that the anti-suggestion barriers are lowered. In the initial stages of Suggestopedia, as much time as is required should be devoted to the Relaxation Training Sequence. During this time, the instructor should be striving to accomplish two major goals.

First, care should be taken in ensuring that each student understands the feeling of being physically relaxed. During the training sequence, instructions are given to the student concerning different muscle groups and the feeling that one has when they are tense or up-tight and the feeling when they are relaxed. Correct deep breathing exercises are also included in the Relaxation Training Sequence and are most important in achieving the required physical relaxation. When working with English speaking students, proper comprehension of the training sequence should present no major problems; however, when E.S.L. students are involved, considerable physical demonstration of the various muscle groups may be required before complete understanding is acquired. Physical relaxation is important in the overall suggestopedic process, and it is the instructor's responsibility to ensure that all students understand how to properly relax.

Second and of equal importance to physical relaxation, is the "mood" or atmosphere created by the instructor in his interactions with the students. "A warm, understanding, sympathetic setting induces a state of mental calm which may well be more important than the muscle relaxation which is used as the vehicle in relaxation training and exercises." (1:9) As the instructor, one should strive to induce a tension-free environment: an environment in which the student feels secure and relatively free from tension -- producing

forces. Research indicates that it is very possible to achieve physical relaxation without reducing tension and anxiety, thus supporting the major importance of mental relaxation in the relaxation process. (1) Therefore, it is vitally important that the student feels physically relaxed and mentally relaxed -- free from tension and anxiety -- but at the same time, mentally alert.

Suggestion Achieving the required relaxed physical and mental state with the accompanying mental alertness is accomplished through a "suggestive - persuasive - re-educative approach aimed toward increasing the self-confidence, self-understanding, and situational control of the individual." (1:9) However, this approach should not be confused with therapeutic techniques such as hypnosis or transcendental meditation. Mental alertness is a key ingredient in Suggestopedia, but the application of the mental awareness is quite different from either hypnosis or T.M. Students involved in Suggestopedia are often encouraged to fantasize or visualize the material as it is presented to them. In the work being done at South Plains College, students are often asked to visualize the scenes of the story as it is read with the anticipated result being increased mental stimulation and alertness.

Self-Confidence One very important aspect of the suggestive process is that of increased student self-confidence. Once again, the instructor plays a significant role in the creation of an atmosphere where students are encouraged and complimented in a positive and helpful manner. Mistakes are corrected in a quite, non-critical way so as not to impede any possible input of new material to the student. Positive and inspirational statements are often incorporated into the relaxation and suggestive sequences. Phrases like, "I have confidence in my ability to learn new material;" or "If I am called on, I can respond immediately and effectively," are common during the relaxation and suggestive portions of Suggestopedia.

Of particular importance is the fact that much of the outcome of Suggestopedia is in terms of personal adjustment. This author is of the opinion that increased self-awareness and self-confidence are prerequisite to increased learning capabilities. Lozanov indicated that at all levels, individuals involved in suggestopedic learning have increased their self-concept and have emerged with a changed attitude about themselves. (2) This fact alone may make Suggestopedia a most worthwhile teaching strategy.

Music In the suggestopedic process, the role of music is to support the learning process by acting as a medium to activate the subconscious. If the proper relaxed and tranquil state can be achieved by the student and this state is augmented by a musical background, there can be a direct flow of information to the unconscious regions of the brain which results in an automatic assimilation of the material with speed and economy of effort. (1) However, the proper choice of music which is to be used is very important. Music that frees the individual from anxiety and worry is especially good, but care should be exercised in selecting a musical background that is not monotonous or that induces sleep. The slow movements, and particularly the pastoral sequences, of works by Bach, Vivaldi, Handel, Strauss, and Hayden are particularly good as background music for relaxing and learning.

Some of the more recent applications of Suggestopedia are using more contemporary music. This seems to be rather effective, particularly with young adults; and one high school remedial program with a large group of Black students is using appropriate instrumental music performed by Black artists. (1) The over-riding concern in the choice of music should be, then, the type of group with which you are working and the kind of music that best fits their relaxation and learning needs.

All of the components of Suggestopedia are important in achieving significant results from their application. However, recent research is indicating that positive suggestion may be the most important single ingredient of the total process. Of course none of the components, when used by themselves, can match the results achieved from the total suggestopedic procedure; but positive suggestion alone is very effective. For example, when students were presented a list of 50 Spanish words and their English meanings, immediate recall was 33 words for students to whom positive suggestions had been made; while the students for whom the entire suggestopedic process was used retained 37 of the 50 words. Six weeks later, the suggestion only students still retained 27 words; while the group using complete suggestopedic method retained 31 of the words. It is still recommended, however, that the entire suggestopedic method be employed.

Applications Of Suggestopedia To The Teaching Of Reading

Due to the fact that Suggestopedia is a new teaching technique and most applications of the technique have been carried out in Europe, very little is known about projects in the area of reading instruction. The basic applications of the suggestopedic process in European institutions has been in the writing, speaking, and reading of a foreign language. However, because of the lack of English editions of this work, very little is known concerning the results. (5)

One program that has been initiated in the United States is an elementary remedial reading program in the Huntley Hills Elementary School, DeKalb County School District, Georgia. The first study was composed of eleven students, five of which were classified as SLD (having specific learning disorders) and two as EMR (educable mentally retarded).

Four were simply underachievers, with nc previously identified learning disorder. (3) These eleven students were grouped into two classes of four and one class of three.

After following the suggestopedic method of instruction (with some necessary modifications) for a period ranging from 2.5 to 6 months (25 - 60 hours), the results indicated that this type of instructional system held tremendous potential as a facilitator of increased reading ability. Post-test scores on the Spache Diagnostic Reading Scales ranged from a gain of +2.7 to a -.3 in Oral Reading, with a mean gain of +1.7; a +2.7 to a ± 0 in Silent Reading, with a mean gain of +1.6; to a +2.0 to a ± 0 in Reading Potential (Listen Comprehension), with a mean gain of +1.5. (3) One should remember that these results were achieved with an average of 4.8 months or 45.5 hours of instructions.

The general feeling of those involved with the program was that the results were good; but with further modifications -- some reverting to the more classic suggestopedic method -- and identification of additional variables, the results could be better. Thus a second project was started using twenty students in five classes with four students in each class. The instructional period was 70 days (45 minutes each day).

Review of the results indicates that one of the key variables in achieving positive reading growth was the ability of the individual student to "let go" and relax. Of the twenty students involved, eight evidenced this ability; and of those eight, 100% gained a year or more in Oral Reading, as measured by the Spache test. The average gain was 1.83 years. In Silent Reading, of the same eight students, 100% gained a year or more with an average gain of 1.55 years. The Word Recognition subtest indicated that 85.5% (7 of 8) gained a year or more with an

average gain of 1.01 years. (4) Poorer relaxation responses brought correspondingly poorer gains on the posttest.

In conclusion, the results achieved by these two pilot projects are most encouraging as far as the application of Suggestopedia to the teaching and learning of reading. Admittedly, the use of Suggestopedia with adult reading programs will require some variation from the form applied in these elementary reading programs. But the potential is there; and with careful planning and skillful implementation of the basic suggestopedic method, positive, significant results can be achieved in college reading skills classes.

Applications Of Suggestopedia At South Plains College

The use of Suggestopedia at South Plains College has been limited to two areas of academic endeavor. The first was in an English (grammar) class at a local air force base and was conducted during the period of October through December, 1975. The other is in a college reading skills class, currently in progress, consisting of eight E.S.L. students and eleven English-speaking students. Before discussing the current reading skills class, the application of the suggestopedic method in the language class should be discussed.

The class was composed of 15 enlisted Air Force personnel with an age range of 18 to 22 and a completed educational level of 10th grade to high school graduate. Pretest results, as measured by the California Test of Adult Basic Education, Level D, Language Battery, ranged from 7.5 to 10.1 grade level with a mean score of 8.3. Two groups were utilized, an experimental group consisting of nine students and a control group with six students. Class sessions for both groups were 50 minutes in length

meeting three times per week for 10 weeks. Total instructional time was 25 hours.

The control group was structured in a very traditional manner with class activities centering around a short lecture by the instructor covering the new material for that day followed by student completion of practice exercises in workbooks. Because of the relatively low functioning level of the students, considerable individual attention was provided.

Class organization for the experimental group followed Lozanov's basic suggestopedic process, but it did differ from Classic Suggestopedia. Since an understanding of Classic Suggestopedia is not essential to understanding our modified version, the author will not attempt a discussion of the classic method. However, an attempt will be made to describe the class organization used in our project.

The 50 minute class was structured in this manner. The first 20 minutes are devoted to reviewing the material covered during the previous class. This includes such traditional teaching strategies as practice in workbook exercises, individual help from the instructor, and class discussions of problem areas. Next, a 7 1/2 minute "relaxation tape" is played during which time the students are directed through the structured relaxation technique involving correct breathing, posture, and frame of mind. Background music is also started during the relaxation sequence and continues during the time in which the instructor presents the new material. This presentation of new material is made twice, once with the students looking at their books and concentrating on the presentation, and again with the students directed to close their eyes and listen to the music. Instructor voice intonations are also different for the two presentations. The first presentation is made with the instructor speaking in a normal to authoritarian

tone of voice, and the second presentation is made in a very low, quiet, soothing voice. This presentation of new material takes 20 minutes; and upon completion, a 1 1/2 minute tape is played which brings the students back to their normal state of awareness and also concludes the session.

Results of the initial suggestopedic project were encouraging but not significant. The size of the primary control group (control group 1) precluded any significant comparisons from being drawn. Therefore, two other control groups (one consisting of five students and the other composed of seven students) were employed. These students were from previous English classes at the air force base in which traditional methods of instruction were employed. Results are reflected by use of One Way Analysis of Variance by Groups, Experimental and Combined Control Group Comparisons by Score Category, and Spearman Rank-Order Correlations.

ONE WAY ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE BY GROUPS

Criterion Variable: English Pretest Score by Group

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experimental	9	8.78	0.71
Control 1	6	7.72	0.15
Control 2	5	7.12	0.47
Control 3	7	8.67	1.11

F = 7.33 Significant at the .01 level

Criterion Variable: English Posttest Score by Group

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experimental	9	9.43	1.55
Control 1	6	8.45	0.75
Control 2	5	6.48	0.96
Control 3	7	9.10	1.34

F = 6.41 Significant at the .01 level

Criterion Variable: English Pretest Score by Combined Group

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experimental	9	8.78	.71
Combined Control	18	7.92	.96

F = 5.57 Significant at the .05 level

Criterion Variable: English Posttest by Combined Group

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experimental	9	9.43	1.55
Combined Control	18	8.16	1.50

F = 4.27 Significant at the .05 level

Criterion Variable: English Net Gain or Loss by Combined Group

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experimental	9	.66	1.03
Combined Control	18	.23	.96

F = 1.11 Not Significant

EXPERIMENTAL AND COMBINED CONTROL GROUP COMPARISONS

BY SCORE CATEGORY

Score Category	Experimental			Combined Control			t	Significance
	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Mean	Standard Deviation		
Pretest	9	8.78	0.71	18	7.92	0.96	2.36	.05
Posttest	9	9.43	1.55	18	8.16	1.50	2.07	.05
Change	9	0.66	1.03	18	0.23	0.96	1.05	Not Significant

SPEARMAN RANK-ORDER CORRELATIONS

English Pretest and English Posttest

Experimental Group $r_s = .75$

Combined Group $r_s = .93$

English Pretest and Relaxation Rating $r_s = .01$

English Posttest and Relaxation Rating $r_s = .17$

English Pretest-Posttest Gain and Relaxation Rating $r_s = .38$

A review of the results indicates that there is a significant difference (.05 level) between the pretest and posttest scores of the experimental group as compared to the combined control group. However, comparison of the overall change between the two groups is not significant, although it is approaching significance ($t = 1.05$). An excellent correlation does exist between English pretest-posttest gain and relaxation rating ($r_s = .38$), which lends considerable support to the findings of the Georgia remedial reading projects. Also of interest is the fact that of the 27 students involved in the project, the two highest pretest-posttest gains (2.4 and 1.7 grade levels) were recorded by students in the experimental group.

One variable that we encountered that appears to be most difficult to control is the total lack of motivation on the part of the student to learn. Of the nine students in the experimental group, eight had been forced to attend the class. Therefore, they had very little desire to learn and deeply resented having to be in class.

However, when compared to previous classes, the use of Suggestopedia appears to have worked better than more traditional modes of instruction; students did respond to it better (as reflected in the results), and they did evidence positive self-concept changes. Consequently, the conclusion could be made that Suggestopedia was, at least, a partial success and does hold promise for future applications.

Current Applications In Reading The current application of Suggestopedia at South Plains College is in a college reading skills class consisting of eight E.S.L. students and eleven English speaking students. Suggestopedia is being used with the eight E.S.L. students; five of which are from Viet Nam, and one each from Iran, Peru, and Thailand. Reading levels of the group range from 3.2 to 7.0 with a mean score of 5.4, thus allowing all

students to work in one group. As the class is in progress, concrete results concerning the true value of Suggestopedia when used in this manner are not available. However, preliminary, daily results are indicating that it is a valuable technique in improving the reading and vocabulary skills of this kind of student.

Class organization is very similar to that which was used in the English project. The one major difference is in the time allocated for class meetings. In the reading skills class, four hours of instruction per week (two hours per day, two days per week) are provided with two hours per week (one hour per day) reserved for application of Suggestopedia. In the remaining two hours per week, the students work in the reading lab on specific study skills, vocabulary skills, and other pertinent course work.

The organization of the suggestopedic portion of the class follows these lines. First, a very short over-view of the day's activities is given (one minute). Such things as the stories that are to be read and their page numbers and the vocabulary words and their page numbers are announced. The answering of any questions concerning the day's activities is also carried on during this short, introductory portion. It is most important that everyone is aware of what and where the day's activities are because questions are not allowed during the actual suggestopedic phase of the class. Next, the 7 1/2 minute "relaxation tape" is played with accompanying background music. At the conclusion of the tape, the instructor begins the presentation of the day's new material. This presentation is repeated twice, once during the active portion of the seance and once during the passive portion. (The term "seance", when used in association with the suggestopedic method, is used in the traditional

French sense, rather than the mystical interpretation). Total time for both presentations is 50 minutes.

During the active seance, the students are directed to read along silently as the instructor reads aloud. The reading by the instructor should be done in a voice intonation that is a mixture of normal and authoritarian tones. The new vocabulary words and their contextual meanings are also presented, in the same tones as the stories, with the students continuing to following along in their books. Upon completion of the three stories and the corresponding vocabulary, the students are directed to close their books, close their eyes, and become very comfortable and relaxed.

With the students in this relaxed condition, the passive portion of the seance is conducted. During the re-reading of the same three stories and vocabulary words, this time in a very quiet, soft, soothing tone, the students are asked to either visualize the stories as they are read or simply listen to the music. In either case, they are asked not to concentrate on the actual words that are being read. In reviewing results from past suggestopedic projects and in analyzing the current projects, it appears that the passive seance is a most important activity as it relates to achieving real gains from the total technique. The student's ability to thoroughly let go and relax is manifested during this time with this ability usually having a direct relationship on one's achieved results. The instructor would also want to observe this ability in the students in order to counsel with those students who were having difficulty.

At the conclusion of the passive seance, the entire suggestopedic activity is concluded. The 1 1/2 minute "conclusion tape" is played which brings the students back to their normal functioning state. After

a short break, the class resumes for an additional hour of work in the lab during which time questions are answered concerning the new material presented that day. Total working time for the entire session is approximately 2 1/2 hours.

Results concerning the use of Suggestopedia in college reading skills classes are inconclusive at this time. However, preliminary conclusions drawn from student interviews and periodic tests indicate that the process is working. Student tension and anxiety levels appear to be low, and the frustration involved in learning to read more efficiently is noticeably less of a problem than when the class was initiated. Of great importance, at least to this writer, is the fact that the students are extremely excited about the class and thoroughly enjoy it. We are also finding that material coverage is approximately three times greater than what would normally be expected with at least doubled comprehension. These inconclusive results are leading us to believe that Suggestopedia is a most worthwhile and valuable technique in working with E.S.L. students and disabled readers.

Summary

Suggestopedia is a teaching technique combining memory expansion and relaxation, creating an alert but relaxed state of mind, during which the anti-suggestion barriers are lowered and increasing the receptiveness of the individual to suggestion and retention of new material. This condition is induced through a combination of physical and mental relaxation, suggestion, and a musical background conducive to relaxation. Anxiety and tension producing forces are held to a minimum while increased self-awareness and confidence are emphasized.

The technique, developed by Dr. George Lozanov, a Bulgarian psychiatrist, is widely used in Bulgarian educational institutions from nursery school

through university levels. However, the lack of English editions of these projects makes it most difficult for American educators to review the procedures and results attained from these applications.

Projects involving Suggestopedia in American educational institutions have ranged from college level foreign language and psychology courses to elementary remedial reading courses. Application of the suggestopedic technique is currently being carried on in a college reading skills class at South Plains College with indications being that the process is certainly worthy of continued use and expansion. A previous project involving Suggestopedia in a language class at South Plains College yielded only minimally significant results as far as academic achievement was concerned, but did indicate that the process was beneficial in improving student self-awareness and confidence.

Additional suggestopedic projects are very necessary so that an accurate evaluation of the process can be made. Only after American educators have delved into the technique as thoroughly as our European counterparts will we know if Suggestopedia is worthy of continued use.

Conclusions

From the results obtained from the projects discussed in this paper and from others examined by the author, it would appear that Suggestopedia could, and has in some cases, become a very important teaching strategy. However, until English editions of the extensive work done in European institutions becomes available, concrete conclusions will be most difficult to make. A large portion of the experimentation with Suggestopedia in the United States has been a modification of Lozanov's Classic Suggestopedia. The results attained in these projects indicate that it may be necessary for American educators to return to the classic method before truly significant results and conclusions can be achieved.

The projects involving the use of Suggestopedia at South Plains College have yielded promising results, but further development and experimentation is required before definite, positive conclusions are drawn. However, we are extremely pleased with the results achieved in the areas of self-image improvement and retention of larger amounts of material in shorter periods of time. There can be very little doubt that increased self-image and confidence are key contributing factors to increased retention, and the aspects of Suggestopedia which allow for this may make Suggestopedia a very constructive instructional system.

In conclusion, it can be said that Suggestopedia is potentially a significant development in the area of new and effective teaching techniques. Through further experimentation in realistic educational settings and continued development of suggestopedic procedures for American educational institutions, the conclusion may be drawn that Suggestopedia is truly the educational innovation for the future.

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